TEYL – Teaching Listening and Speaking to Young Learners

updated on November 15, 2020by Alice Glass

How can you develop listening and speaking in your learners as a TEYL teacher? Read this academic essay to discover new, efficient methods!

Developing listening skills is the first step in the second language acquisition process. The learners need to listen to meaningful and comprehensible language during their silent period of language acquisition. Speaking, as a productive skill, comes after the development of basic listening skills.

What are the principles for designing listening activities?

According to Shin and Crandal (2014), when designing listening activities for young learners, we need to remember the following seven principles:

Prepare your lines carefully.

Use listening activities that reflect real-life learning.

The listening activities should be developmentally appropriate.

Use a variety of techniques to make listening input comprehensible.

Check comprehension using a variety of response types.

Keep listening active – always give learners a listening task.

Equip your students with intelligent guesswork strategies.

The most effective listening activities activate prior knowledge with pictures or realia. By activating prior knowledge, the children will also review the known vocabulary and pre-teach unknown vocabulary. It is important to prepare students for listening by contextualizing the listening practice, to give them listening tasks to create active learning, to use TPR activities, songs and dramatizations.

Here are some examples of motivating listening activities:

Listen and do, listen and show, listen and point, listen and make,

Using flashcards for pre-teaching new vocabulary,

Performing silent dramatization during the listening activities.

We already mentioned some TPR activities in the form of listen + do, which can be used for listening comprehension. The total physical response approach is very useful when it comes to remembering new vocabulary, since the students use their body to remember. This creates an active learning environment. Learning-by-doing is the most effective activity to check comprehension. There are many other ways to check if the learners understood the language. Lund (1990, p.259) provided a comprehensive list of ways

to check students' comprehension. They include:

Listening and doing,

Choosing and matching pictures or objects,

Transferring the information to another form,

Answering questions,

Problem-solving,

Role-plays after listening, etc.

Continuing to speaking

In the next few paragraphs, we will discuss speaking skills. Teaching listening and speaking in TEYL is intertwined and both skills are taught simultaneously.

Using songs, rhymes, and chants to teach speaking, with TPR activities is a very motivating way of introducing a new topic, or revising the content from a previous unit. Children enjoy singing, and the melody helps them remember faster, easier and permanently.

There are several steps for teaching songs, according to Shin and Crandall (2014). These steps include:

Introducing the topic of the song,

Reviewing the vocabulary students already know,

Pre-teaching the new vocabulary, listening to the song with added TPR activities,

Teaching the verses one by one.

Another important step is to point out words that rhyme at the end of each line and practice repeating them when teaching each verse.

Introducing new vocabulary and language production

Teaching new vocabulary and reviewing the old vocabulary should be done before any activity, regardless of which language skill is being practiced. The vocabulary can be taught by using realia, pictures, flashcards, gestures, dramatization, drawing, giving synonyms and antonyms, using the word in a sentence, etc. Translating and defining the new vocabulary should be avoided unless the words are far above the learner's language level.

When it comes to speaking, and language production in general, mistakes cannot be avoided. Because of that, teachers should differentiate controlled, guided and free speaking activities. In the controlled activities focus is on the language accuracy and the errors in speaking should be positively corrected by repetition in a meaningful context, not by repeating the vocabulary or grammar structure out of context.

When it comes to the guided activities, errors could be corrected, but that depends on the goal of the guided activity and what the teacher wants to achieve. In the free speaking activities, the goal is on developing communication skills, group work and social skills, so the errors should not be corrected. In this case, the teacher should only monitor the students.

Examples of speaking activities

Examples of effective independent speaking activities are:

Performing a role-play or a dialog,

Performing real-life tasks,

Interviewing a native speaker or someone from another country in English, etc.

These activities have many common aspects. They are highly motivating, they have a meaningful context, and the learners can become more independent while engaged in these kinds of activities.

Finally, when it comes to teaching listening and speaking, teachers must use a wide range of interesting activities to establish active learning and proper language acquisition.

In conclusion, listening is an active skill, and speaking is an interactive skill. These skills need to be developed by scaffolding, and they need to be integrated into a lesson plan. Speaking activities should go from controlled to independent practice, and the learners should be able to apply their foreign language knowledge in an authentic situation.

Explore this article below about teaching reading and writing to young learners.

Resources:

Savic, V. (2018).Teaching Listening and Speaking, PPT

Savic, V. (2014). Total Physical Response (TPR) Activities in Teaching English to Young Learners. In Ignjatovic, A. and Markovic, Z. (eds.), Physical Education and Contemporary Society, pp. 447-454. Jagodina: Faculty of Education.

Shin, J. K. & Crandall, J. (2014). Teaching Young Learners English: From Theory to Practice. Boston: Heinle ELT, Cengage Learning.

Schindler, A. (2006). Channeling children's energy through vocabulary exercises. English Teaching Forum, 44(2), 8-12. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1107891.pdf